

Mary: So now we're into the 6th week of our practice period. Our theme has been "Gladdening the heart, freeing the mind from the hindrances." Jean and Iris started off with a talk about intention, attitude, and the refuges. Next, John and I talked about the gradual training path. Then Mary talked about the 1st hindrance, sensual desire, and Jean followed that with a talk about the many forms of ill will. Last week, Geneva and I talked about Sloth and Torpor. And tonight we're on the 4th hindrance, Restless and Worry, also translated as Restlessness and Remorse, or worry and flurry or hustle and bustle.

So to begin with, let's hear what the Buddha says about R&W, in the Satipattana Sutta, the Four Foundations of Mindfulness. It's the same as with all the other hindrances. The same way of practicing with them. "If restlessness and worry are present in one, one knows, there is restlessness and worry in me. One knows how unarisen restlessness and worry can arise, how arisen restlessness and worry can be removed, and how the future arising of the removed restlessness and worry can be prevented." In other words, know if you're restless, or not, know what triggers it, know how to remove or overcome it and how to prevent its returning.

So what is the experience of restlessness? It can be mental/emotional or physical, or both. For me, if my body's jumping around, my mind is usually all over the place, too. But the mind can be restless at any time, no matter what the body's doing, even in our dreams when we're asleep. A restless mind jumps from the breath to the past to the future, breath, past, future, to what I did, what I didn't do, what I should do, what I'll do next. Never landing anywhere. And consequently, missing out on everything—because of not being present.

Worry, we know, is about the future: all the "what-ifs", often imagining the worst; worry that what we don't want to happen will happen. Or worry that things we do want won't happen. As if worry could affect the outcome. Worry is different from planning. Ayya Khema says that planning turns into worrying when a person starts thinking about whether the plan will materialize, or not. She also says that most of our thinking is totally unnecessary.

So worry's about the future—Remorse, on the other hand, is about the past—things we did, things we didn't do. All the “if- onlys.” If only I could take those words back. If only I had thought to apologize.

As individuals, we might lean more toward remorse or toward worry, depending on our conditioning and mental habits. I tend to worry—for example, I spent almost a whole morning just worrying about this talk—how we could possibly put all the material together. I even sent a couple of despairing emails to Geneva before I realized I was having a restlessness and worry attack. Fortunately, Geneva stayed grounded.

Geneva: Well, that time I did, but it's so easy to get caught. Here's an example of being scattered that occurred for me just the other day. I'm teaching a new course this quarter, on a subject that I haven't really thought about much since graduate school, about 25 years ago, so I've had some moments of anxiety about it. I was in a hurry to get to work early to prepare my notes for class. Every morning I make a big pot of tea for my husband, Victor, and me to have with breakfast, the first thing I do after feeding the cat. So I did that. But I left the lid off the pot and I forgot to cover it with the tea cozy, so by the time Victor got up, the tea was cold. Oh, and I left the can of cat food open on the counter. Then, I realized that I had lost track of my watch, so I walked around the house while I was brushing my teeth looking for it. Meanwhile, I had set down my tea cup somewhere, but I couldn't remember where.

In spite of all this, I did manage to get to work early. I remembered my office keys and my lunch, so that was good. I got to my first class and discovered that I had forgotten to bring a handout I had planned to refer to that day. We got along without it though. After class, I started working on the some of the things I wanted to get done by the end of the day, but ended up working with an unusually long stream of students instead. OK, that was good work. Finally, about 15 minutes before my next class, I found time to eat my lunch. Some delicious leftover casserole and I was really hungry. So I pulled out my lunch, and—nothing to eat it with.

The Buddha used two similes to illustrate how restlessness and worry operate. In one simile, he compares a mind gripped by restlessness and worry to a slave. A slave has no freedom, always subject to the demands of others, not able to make choices about what to do or when to do it.

This describes how I felt that morning as I was careening from one thing to another. In the case

of obsessive worry and guilt, you feel locked into an oppressive routine, having the same thoughts over and over again, and it seems like you can't control or stop them. Imagine how it would feel to be released from slavery, the joy and happiness that arise when you realize that now "I am subject to myself, not subject to others, freed, able to go where I like." So too for the mind released from restlessness and worry. **DN 2: The Fruits of Recluship**

Mary: The Buddha also compares restlessness and worry to a pond that's stirred up by wind, rippling, swirling, churned by waves. Looking into such a pond, we can't see our own reflection, or anything else that's reflected in it. And we can't see into the pond's depths, what's really there below the surface disturbance. (It's curious, really, that we're so prone to R&W, even if we've experienced the peace and joy of a still mind, and the insights that a still mind can have. Why is that, anyway? The wind and waves are exciting? They entertain us? Make us feel alive? Something to contemplate.)

So now, I'm going to talk about some things that cause the winds of restlessness and worry and remorse to churn the mind, and then Geneva will talk about ways to remove or overcome them and still the mind.

So, what are some of the causes?

One is what the Buddha calls careless attention, in the case of remorse, dwelling on actions of the past that were unskillful. For example, remorse for not visiting someone we really care about when she was sick or dying. But with careful attention, we think about the good things that we've done, as well--either for that person or for someone else. Not that we shouldn't feel the remorse. Befriending it can help us learn from the unskillful action and change our ways. We can set intentions to do better another time—other loved ones will get sick and die—there'll be another chance. Again, I think of Ayya Khema's phrase, "Acknowledge, no blame, change. Guilt, by the way, is different from remorse. Guilt traps us in the past. With guilt there's blame and no change.

As for careless attention to worry. Worry can be such a habit. It springs from craving and fear. But the more we worry, the deeper the worry-rut in the mind becomes, and then, of course, the more we worry. So try to catch yourself when you start to worry, or as soon as you can: you might notice some tension in the body, tightness in the face or the neck, a clutching feeling in the

chest or stomach. Often there's a sense of, hey wait a minute, I'm not really here anymore. So then come back and ask yourself, is this worry useful? Will it make things better? Is this how I want to spend my energy? Does this make me happy or more miserable?

Craving is a big cause of restlessness. Perhaps the biggest. Wanting something, or wanting to get rid of something. Discontent. Nothing's quite good enough. The fault-finding mind. It's easy to fall into. It can consume a whole meditation period. Or even a whole day. Or sadly, even a whole life. Thank goodness the Buddha shows us a way to end all this unhappiness and discontent.

So what if we do get what we want, what we think will make us happy? Does it make us happy? Maybe yes, maybe no. And if it does, good, we can be grateful. However, we'd better hold whatever it is lightly. Things change. Clinging to it causes more restlessness and worry. Because then there's the fear of losing what we're clinging to. Or regret for what we've lost already. It could be a person—people leave; they die. It could be a material object, like a favorite cup, or a perfect pair of hiking boots. Or something immaterial—one's peace of mind during meditation.

Which brings us to an underlying, bottom-line cause of restlessness. That's the pervasive belief that there's constancy. That things will stay the same and last. That what we're restlessly searching for in the world, if we can just find it, will be solid and reliable and bring us peace. The Buddha teaches otherwise—that there is no constancy or permanence anywhere. And what's more, the "I" that's doing the searching isn't constant or substantial either. So there's actually nothing to hold onto, and no one to hold on to it. And really, until we understand that, from our own experience, we'll always be on the move, so...always restless. The Buddha says that we're not completely free from restlessness until we're almost arahants. But we can cultivate temporary freedom from restlessness and worry, moments here and now when we know they're not within us, moments of peace and gladness in our hearts. Which is what Geneva's going to talk about. Overcoming restless, remorse and worry.

Geneva: As with all of the hindrances, if we want to be free from restlessness and worry we need understand them, rather try to rid of them quickly. So one thing we can do is investigate. Notice the difference between restlessness and worry—how they register in the body and the mind. Restlessness feels more scattered; worry feels more anxious.

Being mindful of the cause may be more helpful than being mindful of the restlessness itself. Mary has talked about some of the causes: Dissatisfaction, frustrated desire, pent-up aversion, fear and resentment, etc. Ignoring the causes keeps us skimming the surface. Not to brood and obsess about them, but to gain insight about how this mind state arises.

A lot of the time, thinking is a big part of the restlessness and worry, and investigation may not be helpful or even possible. So we can focus on letting go physically, by relaxing all the parts of the body that tend to get tense or tight when we are stressed: softening the eyes, forehead, jaws, shoulders, stomach, slowly releasing on successive out breaths. Breathing conscious of the whole body, or focusing on the rhythm of breathing in and out can calm us physically. The more careful attention given to experiencing the breath, the less attention available to fuel restlessness and worry. We're just noticing—not obsessing.

As we calm the body, we can calm the mind. In a passage from the Samyutta Nikaya, the Buddha says:

When the mind is restless it is not the proper time for cultivating the following factors of enlightenment: investigation of the doctrine, energy and rapture, because an agitated mind can hardly be quieted by them.

When the mind is restless, it is the proper time for cultivating the following factors of enlightenment: tranquility, concentration and equanimity, because an agitated mind can easily be quieted by them. —**Samyutta Nikaya 46:53**

And it helps to keep things in perspective, that's where equanimity comes in. As Mary said, restlessness and worry are not completely uprooted until full enlightenment, and most of us aren't quite there yet. Reflecting on this may help us be more patient with our own mind states.

There's a story in the Anguttara Nikaya about Ven. Anuruddha, one of the Buddha's most trusted and skilled disciples, said to have mastered the "divine eye." But he was troubled about his progress on the path, so he paid a visit to the Ven. Sariputta, who was considered to be second only to the Buddha in wisdom.

After an exchange of friendly greetings & courtesies, he sat to one side. As he was sitting there, he said to Ven. Sariputta: By means of the divine eye, purified and surpassing the human, I see

the thousand-fold cosmos. My persistence is aroused and unsluggish. My mindfulness is established and unshaken. My body is calm and unaroused. My mind is concentrated into singleness. And yet my mind is not released from the effluents through lack of clinging.

Sariputta: My friend, when the thought occurs to you, 'By means of the divine eye, purified & surpassing the human, I see the thousand-fold cosmos,' that is related to your conceit (identifying with a self). When the thought occurs to you, 'My persistence is aroused & unsluggish. My mindfulness is established & unshaken. My body is calm & unperturbed. My mind is concentrated into singleness,' that is related to your restlessness. When the thought occurs to you, 'And yet my mind is not released from the effluents through lack of clinging/sustenance,' that is related to your anxiety. It would be well if — abandoning these three qualities, not attending to these three qualities — you directed your mind to the Deathless property.'

So after that, Ven. Anuruddha — abandoning those three qualities, not attending to those three qualities — directed his mind to the Deathless property. Dwelling alone, secluded, heedful, ardent, & resolute, he in no long time reached liberation. He knew: 'Birth is ended, the holy life fulfilled, the task done. There is nothing further for the sake of this world.' And he became another one of the arahants. — **Anguttara Nikaya (Tika-Nipata No. 128)**

This is about letting go of the mind states that feed restlessness and worry. So when you notice that restlessness and worry are present, you have two choices really: you can investigate it to gain insight about the causes and conditions, or you can let it go by cultivating calm and contentment, which will support concentration.

Preventing the future arising of restlessness & worry

In one sutta in the Samyutta Nikaya, the Buddha observes that just as the body is denourished or starved by lack of food, so too are the hindrances starved by wise attention. He says, “There is quietude of mind; frequently giving wise attention to it — that denourishes the arising of restlessness and remorse that have not yet arisen, and denourishes the increase and strengthening of restlessness and remorse that have already arisen. — **SN 46:51, The Food Discourse**

So how to develop quietude of mind? It generally doesn't work very well to just tell it shut up— although that can be an effective strategy for halting the proliferation of thoughts that feed

restlessness and worry. But in the space that follows, we need to shift our attention to thoughts of contentment. Can we find just one little thing that is a source of contentment right now? For me, finding contentment is usually associated with feeling gratitude.

Here's what Ajahn Brahm says about cultivating contentment (Mindfulness, Bliss and Beyond)

Develop contentment with whatever you have—the present moment, the silence, the breath....[I]f you ever see restlessness in your mind, remember the word *contentment*.

Contentment looks for what is right, and it can keep you still.

Contentment is the opposite of fault-finding. One is grateful for this moment, rather than picking out its deficiencies. In meditation restlessness is often the impatience to move quickly on to the next stage (like Anuruddha). But the fastest progress is achieved by those who are content with the stage they are on now. Deepening contentment ripens into the next stage. So be careful of 'wanting to get on with it' and instead learn how to rest in appreciative contentment. That way, the 'doing' disappears and the meditation blossoms.

Some other things that the Buddha recommends for the abandoning restlessness and remorse and preventing their future arising may sound familiar, because they apply to the other hindrances we've talked about already:

- Knowledge of the Buddha's teachings: in particular, the four noble truths, the three marks of existence; the eightfold noble path;
- Practice the principles of moral conduct, i.e., the 5 precepts. This will diminish the opportunities for remorse to arise.
- Noble friendship, association with those mature in age and experience, who possess dignity, restraint and calm;
- Suitable conversation.

Mary: Ajah Chah gave this analogy. At a retreat at his forest monastery in NE Thailand. A student asked this question: When there are hindrances and distracting thoughts in my mind, how do I know when to investigate them and when to just let them go? This was Ajahn Chah's reply: Suppose that you're sitting in your hut. You look out the window and see a stranger walk

by. Someone you've never seen before. You don't know where he comes from or where he's going or what he's up to. In that case, you might want to investigate. But now you look out the window and you see a familiar person walk by. Someone you know really well. You know where he came from, what he does here, what his intentions are. In that case, there's no need to investigate; you can just let him go by.

I'd just like to add that there are times when the familiar, well-investigated hindrances, including restlessness and worry, don't just walk on by. If they persist, and continue to distract us, there might be something there for us to look at, something in their midst that we hadn't noticed before. AND, if the strangers just walk on by and don't disturb us, and they're harmless, our mind doesn't have to chase after them or get entangled with them.

The point is to free the mind from the hindrance, and the art of practice is discerning the best ways of doing that. Discerning them by being mindful and remembering the Buddha's teachings.

Small group discussions: Restlessness and Worry.

This hindrance can take 3 forms:

- Scattered, distracted, unfocussed attention
- Obsessive worrying about the future
- Remorse about past actions

1. Please identify which form has been most present in your life lately.
2. How does it arise—what triggers it?
3. What does it feel like, in your mind and in your body?
4. What have been or could be useful ways of working with it? (From our talk or from your experience.)